The Visibility (or Invisibility) of Disability in the Sport Management Classroom

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There is evidence that disability-related content is being included in some sport management courses. Specifically, content within introductory courses has included the Paralympic Games, the Americans with Disabilities Act, Special Olympics, and the general concept of inclusion (Pitts & Shapiro, 2017). Shapiro et al. (2012) called for disability sport to be infused within sport management curriculum in higher education. Infusion is defined as a systematic approach to integrate knowledge and understanding of disability and disability-related issues throughout a curriculum (DePauw & Goc Karp, 1994). However, it is unclear whether sport management programs are indeed infusing their curriculum with disability-related content or if they may be merely incorporating it into classes.

Pitts and Shapiro (2017) noted that sport management curriculum should reflect the various elements of the industry. Pate and Hardin (2017) proposed various ways in which sport management faculty could incorporate disability sport within core courses such as communications, ethics, event and facility management, governance, intercollegiate athletics, law, marketing and promotions, programming, and sociology. They argued that ignoring an entire demographic or how segments of the industry impact that demographic would be reckless actions by sport management faculty, and therefore including disability into all courses is a step toward holistic preparation of future professionals.

The degree of infusion of disability can be viewed and evaluated along DePauw’s (1997) continuum with Invisibility of Disability at one end, Visibility of Disability at the center, and (In)Visibility of DisAbility at the other end. Invisibility of Disability is the total absence of disability in the curriculum. Visibility of Disability is when disability is present but is viewed unequal to able-bodied sport. (In)Visibility of DisAbility is the presence of and treatment of disability as equal to other sport participants or contexts. The purpose of this study is to explore how disability-related content is included within sport management courses.

This study is currently in process and will be conducted through a qualitative design, where sport management faculty will be invited to participate in semi-structured interviews about how they incorporate disability-related content into the courses they teach. The focus of the interviews will cover which classes faculty incorporate disability-related content, the methods of delivery faculty use to teach that content, and the resources faculty use as support for that content. Interviews will be audio recorded with consent of each participant, and transcripts will be analyzed using the constant comparative method.

It is expected that this study can assist sport management educators to better understand how disability-related content is--or is not--being infused within curricula to identify gaps where improvement can be made. If sport management programs strive to offer a comprehensive education to best prepare future professionals for the industry, disability-related content must be infused within the courses that are essential in that education.